SMOKING, ABSENTEEISM AND PRODUCTIVITY

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SMOKING, ABSENTEEISM AND PRODUCTIVITY

In recent years, managers seeking to make their firms more competitive have focused increasing attention on the issue of employee productivity. One question that has received consideration in this regard has been whether employees who smoke are less productive than nonsmokers, miss work more often than nonsmokers or are more "costly" to employ than nonsmokers. The issue also has become a political football for antismoking crusaders whose stated aim is to make smoking "a behavior that is prohibited at work, that impairs one's employability, and that impedes one's career development."[1] These activists claim that smokers are less productive and more costly to employ than nonsmokers and that employers therefore should refuse to employ smokers.

In fact, however, when all relevant factors are taken into account, there is no persuasive evidence for such claims. The large majority of studies that report any positive association between smoking status and increased absenteeism acknowledge that factors other than smoking may well account for the apparent association. As James Athanasou, an antismoking advocate, stated in an early review article:

> "Sickness absence is a complex behavioral phenomenon in which a multiplicity of health, social and psychological factors are involved. * * * Most investigators have implicitly assumed that the only difference between a non-smoking and a smoking group is their tobacco habit and that any other personal factors are equally distributed within these groups. * * * None of the reported studies has considered the additional effects on sickness absence of job satisfaction, attitudes to work, personality, other psychosocial or

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> socioeconomic variables and the urban factor in conjunction with the effects of smoking."[2]

The key point, as Professors Robert D. Tollison and Richard E. Wagner of George Mason University in the U.S. commented in their 1992 study, is that "smokers and nonsmokers are not identical in all respects other than smoking." Tollison and Wagner explained:

> "Among other things, smokers have an above-average representation in blue collar occupations, they also consume on average an above-average amount of alcohol, although there are many teetotaling smokers and nonsmoking alcoholics, and they generally exercise less than nonsmokers, although smoking bicyclists, swimmers, and joggers can be found. In assuming that people are identical except for their smoking, various diseases and their associated costs are improperly attributed to smoking."[3]

As discussed in the pages that follow, it has not been established that smokers, as a group, are less productive than nonsmokers, miss work more often than nonsmokers or are more costly to employ than nonsmokers. Far from reducing costs and improving productivity, the imposition of smoker hiring bans and smoking bans and restrictions in the workplace can be disruptive and may affect employee morale -- and productivity -- adversely.

1. Do smokers miss work more often than nonsmokers?

The evidence does not support the conclusion that smokers, as a group, miss work more often than nonsmokers when all relevant factors are taken into account. A number of studies conducted throughout the world report no statistically significant association between smoking and absenteeism rates.

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Although some studies do report some positive association, it has been suggested that factors such as relative age and occupational status that may be correlated with the smoking habit rather than smoking itself may explain the reported association.

One four-year prospective study conducted in Czechoslovakia reported, for example, that the mean duration of absence due to illness and accident, and to respiratory diseases separately, was not related to smoking habits.[4] A New Zealand study reported that absenteeism among nonsmokers is only slightly less than among smokers.[5] In fact, the reported difference between smoker and nonsmoker absenteeism amounted to a half-hour per month or less. More importantly, the study reported an association between smoking and a slightly higher absenteeism rate only when it excluded from the nonsmoking group "persons with medical conditions predisposing [them] to need for sick leave."[6] If such persons had not been excluded, the study would have shown either no more, or less, absenteeism among the various smoking subpopulations than among the nonsmokers.

One of the largest and best designed studies of smoking and absenteeism was conducted by the National Chamber Foundation, the research arm of the United States Chamber of Commerce, which undertook a major analysis of data on 33,000 working people.[7] The researchers reported that smoking had no statistically significant relationship to absenteeism. The researchers admitted that the results were "surprising" in light

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of popular perceptions. They also reported that the only significant variables associated with work attendance were income and physical activity.

Similarly, a study of Swedish auto workers by Andersson and Malmgren reported that, considered individually as risk factors, smoking, weight and blood pressure each had "little effect" on absenteeism.[8] Like the National Chamber Foundation, the authors concluded that "the only factor which individually correlates with an increased rate of absence" was a low degree of physical activity during leisure time.

A larger and more recent study of workers in various Israeli industries reported no statistically significant difference in absenteeism rates for female smokers and nonsmokers.[9] A slight association was reported for males, but the authors noted that the association was most pronounced in younger workers, who are more likely to be absent for other reasons, and was only partially explained by an excess of respiratory illness. Another recent study of workers in Shanghai, China, reported a slight association between sick leave and smoking, but the authors observed that the difference was "not large * * * in clinical terms."[10]

As these studies indicate, any reported statistical association between smoking and absenteeism has been slight at best. A statistical association between two events, moreover, does not prove that one is the cause of the other. Data from these as well as other studies of various lifestyle choices and

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absenteeism rates suggest that any observed association between smoking and absenteeism may be attributable to other differences between smokers and nonsmokers that may not have been taken into account by study investigators.

As Dr. Kevin Dowd of the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom observed in a recent report on the economics of smoking, "[s]moking is higher among manual and low-skilled workers who, co-incidentally, have the highest rates of absenteeism. The high absenteeism may therefore be due to the kind of work these workers do and to their levels of education, rather than to their smoking as such."[11] Dr. Dowd also noted that such studies must take into account factors such as "job satisfaction, the amount of boredom attached to the job (again highest in manual and low-skilled occupations), whether pay rates were affected by absenteeism (so many days sick leave are allowed on full pay, loss of bonus payments for not attending work, etc)."

The studies conducted to date generally have not taken such factors into account in assessing any relationship between smoking status and absenteeism. As Katharine Parkes, an Oxford University psychologist, noted in a 1983 study of female student nurses at two hospitals in the United Kingdom:

> "[A] major methodological limitation of many studies relating to sickness absence and smoking is the implicit assumption that smokers and nonsmokers differ only in smoking behavior."[12]

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Dr. Parkes cautioned that "absence from work (particularly short-term absence) does not reflect only health problems; it is also significantly related to a variety of attitudinal, organizational, and personal factors."

Other important factors related to absenteeism that reportedly are correlated with smoking include employment in blue-collar occupations, drinking status and age.[13] For example, it has been reported that employees who are moderate-to-heavy drinkers tend to miss more work than employees who are nondrinkers or light drinkers. Since smoking tends to be more prevalent among moderate-to-heavy drinkers than among nondrinkers or light drinkers, it generally will follow that "smokers" (i.e., moderate-to-heavy drinkers) will miss more work than "nonsmokers" (i.e., nondrinkers or light drinkers). Similarly, younger employees tend to miss more work than older employees. Since smoking is more prevalent among younger employees than among older employees, it generally will follow that "smokers" (i.e., younger employees) will miss more work than "nonsmokers" (i.e., older employees).

Writing in 1983, Professor Lewis C. Solomon of the University of California in Los Angeles put the matter this way:

> "Many studies have reported a higher incidence of smoking among blue-collar workers than among white-collar workers. Therefore, if relatively low-paid assembly line workers are more inclined to skip work occasionally than are top executives, a correlation between smoking and absenteeism would be observed. But rather than a causal relationship between smoking and work-loss days, the correlation would probably be due to

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> job boredom, lack of commitment to the employer, low pay and so on. Another confounding factor * * * is the fact that sick leave substitutes for vacation time in certain jobs."[14]

As Professor Solomon suggests, particularly in blue-collar jobs, where smokers are most heavily represented, sick leave often is a fringe benefit that substitutes for vacation time. Blue-collar workers simply may be using their sick-leave as vacation time, but researchers erroneously attribute their absences to smoking.[15]

A recently published study of British civil servants reinforces those conclusions.[16] In the Whitehall II study, lower socioeconomic and job status were associated more strongly with higher rates of absenteeism than any other factor or combination of factors, including smoking. A number of Dutch studies reported comparable findings, which parallel those observed in most industrialized nations.[17] Similarly, the authors of the Shanghai study emphasized that "many health factors which cause staff to take sick leave affect smokers and nonsmokers alike; for instance, epidemics or mental illness."[18]

Perhaps the best example of the pitfalls of inferring a causal relationship from a small statistical correlation is found in the studies of pipe and cigar smokers and absenteeism. One study of male employees of a manufacturing company reported that pipe and cigar smokers had the lowest rate of absenteeism in a study of male employees of a manufacturing company.[19] As Professors Robert D. Tollison and Richard E. Wagner of George

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Mason University in the United States observed, "those who seek to infer causation from statistical correlation would, if they were judicious and consistent, have to become advocates of pipes and cigars."[20] Of course, it would be absurd to suggest that employers should recruit pipe and cigar smokers to improve work attendance rates.[21] Just as cigarette smokers are most heavily represented in blue-collar occupations where absenteeism rates are highest,[22] pipe and cigar smokers are most heavily represented in white-collar professions, where absenteeism rates are lowest. As Holcomb and Meigs stated in their 1972 study which reported lower absenteeism among pipe and cigar smokers:

> "[O]ur study suggests caution before trying to assign to one or another kind of smoking a major responsibility for either high or low medical absenteeism. Observation of individual rates within groups showed extensive over-lapping of highs and lows with those in other groups. Other factors must be playing substantial parts."[23]

2. Are smokers less productive than nonsmokers?

As with absenteeism, a multiplicity of factors have been reported to affect employee productivity. They include capital investments in plant and equipment, the quality of the firm's management, the company's organizational structure, and the education, training and motivation of the workforce. In light of these factors, it is not surprising that smoking has been reported to be among the least significant elements affecting employee productivity. In fact, some studies even suggest that smokers are more productive than nonsmokers. For example, in a 1984 study of financial institution managers in

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one of the United States, researchers analyzed various factors believed to relate to productivity. Contrary to their expectations, the researchers reported that the managers who smoke "tend to be more productive than those who do not." With respect to the other factors studied, the researchers found that those managers who do not snack between meals tend to be more productive than those who do, those who exercise regularly are more productive than those who exercise infrequently or never, and those who get between seven and eight hours of sleep at night are more productive than those who get more or less than that.[24]

Similarly, in a 1984 survey of 2,000 top-line managers and union officials in the United States conducted by Response Analysis, 66 percent stated their opinion that smoking while working has no significant effect (or has a positive effect) on employee productivity, 74 percent stated that smoking during breaks has no negative effect on employee job performance, and 17 percent stated that smoking during work breaks actually has a positive effect on job performance.[25] The supervisors interviewed for this national study also said that employers should not discriminate against smokers when hiring new employees. As common sense would suggest, the most productive workers were reported to be those who possess such attributes as competence, dependability and accuracy. Personal unhappiness caused by domestic troubles was reported to be the leading cause of reduced productivity. The managers interviewed for the survey

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were considered to be highly credible because they "directly observe employees all day long, and must be particularly sensitive to factors influencing productivity."[26] A British survey of "The Times Top 1000" companies in 1988 also reported that half of all companies did not believe that smoking bans would improve productivity and one-third said that a ban actually would decrease productivity.[27]

Whether or not smokers are more or less productive than nonsmokers, however, the basic premise that workers should be restricted in their personal habits or banned from hiring because of "group generalizations" is unacceptable. For example, a study looking at relative weight and smoking as predictors of absence and sickness stated that "all deviations from optimal weight are potentially detrimental" to work attendance.[28] Should employers refuse to hire people who are too fat or too thin? As Tollison and Wagner have stated:

> "Capriciousness or prejudice [should not] replace science * * *. Someone who does not like smoking can assign the costs to smoking, someone who does not like sedentary lifestyles can assign the costs to inactivity, someone who does not like alcohol can assign the costs to drinking, and so on."[29]

Allowing employers to dictate employee lifestyle choices in the name of spurring "productivity" threatens basic values of privacy and personal autonomy. Few would propose that an employer concerned about increasing productivity should base employment decisions on an applicant's eating, sleeping and exercising habits -- even though several studies suggest that

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these habits are related to productivity.[30] And surely no one would suggest that an employer should quiz applicants about the state of their domestic relationships, even though numerous studies, including one recent study of Swedish men, have reported a sharp increase in absenteeism among men separating from or divorcing their wives.[31] This is precisely the path charted by those who advocate banishing smokers from the workplace in the name of boosting "productivity."

Most antismoking advocates readily would agree that it is not legitimate for employers to base hiring decisions on such considerations -- even for the sake of improving productivity. But if employers are allowed to pass judgment on employees based on one lifestyle choice, there is no logical reason why they should not be allowed to pass judgment based on other lifestyle choices. Simply stated, smoking should be treated like any other personal lifestyle choices that people enjoy.

Given such concerns, it is not surprising that many employees react negatively to employer or government proposals to ban or severely restrict smoking. A 1992 statement by a leading French trade union, for example, strongly denounced recently imposed government restrictions on smoking as an offensive intrusion on employee and union rights. "[T]he autocratic nature of the provisions * * * will be viewed by employees as an imposition from above and will generate insupportable inequalities between employees * * *."[32]

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3. From the employer's standpoint, are employees who smoke more costly than nonsmoking employees?

Estimates of the "costs" supposedly imposed by employees who smoke[33] are largely speculative and vary wildly. One antismoking activist, for example, has claimed that smokers cost American employers between $336 and $601 annually per smoker (in 1980 dollars),[34] while another has claimed that the cost exceeds $4,500 (in 1985 dollars).[35] Reviewing some of these assertions, James Golden of the Sheet Metal Workers' International Association, writing in 1990, stated that, "to date, there is insufficient evidence to support these claims."[36]

Batenburg and Reinken, in their 1990 paper, similarly stated that "[t]he literature on the costs to employers of smoking employees vis-a-vis nonsmoking ones is small and without much consensus."[37] In his 1989 report, the United States Surgeon General stated:

> "There is little empirical evidence about the economic impact of worksite smoking policies because systematic analyses have not been done. Employee absenteeism, productivity, or health care costs have rarely been assessed."[38]

Antismoking activists themselves have all but acknowledged that their estimates are arbitrary. William Weis, the author of the $4,500 guesstimate, has stated that "it is a difficult exercise to calculate a specific savings, or even a range of savings, that a firm should expect" from banning smoking and smokers from the workplace.[39] Marvin Kristein, the author of the $336-$601 guesstimate, likewise has stated that

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"[t]he numbers are 'ballpark' figures, not seat and aisle numbers."[40] Weis was careful to hedge his bets by stating that an employer would have to wait *five years* after banning smoking in the workplace and undertaking to hire only nonsmokers to realize the supposed cost savings.[41]

Weis' estimates have proven to be controversial, to say the least. Professor Lewis C. Solomon of the Graduate School of Education at UCLA has stated that "scrutiny of Weis' material, reveals that his analysis is faulty and his conclusions are without merit. * * * [I]ndeed, virtually every part of his estimate is unfounded and he compounds his errors by surveying those persons most against smoking."[42]

Kristein's estimates have been similarly questioned. While observing that Kristein's estimates are "considerably more conservative than others in the literature," Dr. Diana Chapman Walsh of Harvard University's School of Public Health has stated:

> "[Kristein's] accounting scheme deviates from those noted in other cost-of-illness (or risk factor) research reports. Also, confounding factors seem inadequately controlled [by Kristein], and justifications for some of the assumptions seem weak (e.g., compared to non-smokers, smokers use one-half again the health care, have twice as many accidents, miss work two more days a year, and waste 8 minutes a day in smoking rituals)."[43]

As Dr. Walsh's comments indicate, the methodology employed by the antismokers frequently is scientifically flawed. Typically, antismokers simply apportion to employees who smoke

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costs presumed to be due to smoking. They do not compare the actual experience of companies that employ smokers (and permit smoking in the workplace) with the experience of those companies that do not. As Kristein himself explained in his 1983 study:

> "We lack meaningful 'case-controlled' company comparisons of experience with smoking employees vs nonsmoking employees vs ex-smokers and [their] impact on company costs. Therefore, we * * * work from aggregate national epidemiological data on illness and other costs associated with smoking and attempt to apportion a realistic share to smoking employees."[44]

Thus, the aim of the antismoking movement appears to be not to help employers realize savings but rather to utilize hiring as a tool for eradicating smoking. Weis, an antismoking advocate, has stated candidly that his goal is to eliminate smoking by making it "a behavior that is prohibited at work, that impairs one's employability, and that impedes one's career development."[45] The use of employment opportunities as a means of controlling personal lifestyle decisions, however, is extremely troubling in a free society. As two respected British economists have concluded --

> "There is a danger of action in any one case 'opening the floodgates' to other forms of autocratic behaviour across a much wider range. If prohibitions become standard practice, a democratic society is at the mercy of fanatical pressure groups."[46]

As for the claim that smokers impose higher "maintenance costs" on their employers than non-smokers,[47] all employees, whether or not they smoke, impose a variety of "maintenance costs" on employers -- from spilled coffee on the

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carpet to broken coat hangers in the closet. Employers could reduce their "maintenance costs" across the board by prohibiting all sorts of behaviors in the workplace, from drinking and eating to wearing shoes inside on rainy or snowy days. If the goal is to reduce the cost of "maintaining" employees to zero, employers even could require all employees to work at metal desks, seated on metal chairs, and they could eliminate all other amenities as well.

The "maintenance costs" associated with tolerating personal behaviors in the workplace must be considered in light of the intrusiveness of prohibitions against them. A decision to ban smoking to reduce the costs of cleaning the draperies is no different in kind from a decision to cut off the heat in the winter to reduce gas and electric utility bills. Each such decision involves a trade-off between employer cost and employee comfort and satisfaction. If the goal is to reduce employee "maintenance costs," employers should look to reducing costs in marginal areas not relating to human activity and personal comfort before regulating profit-generating employees who happen to drink coffee or soft drinks or who happen to smoke.

What "maintenance costs" should be incurred is a question of business policy for each employer to decide and is not an appropriate subject of legislative action. As Tollison and Wagner have stated:

> "Employers, of course, have incentives to mitigate accidental damage to property, whether by smokers or nonsmokers. But the kinds of

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> accounting statistics commonly reported in these matters give no convincing basis for concluding that smokers are a source of excess property damage. And in any event, the issues created are ones of individual business policy and not of public policy, for it is the owners of the businesses who bear whatever costs may be incurred."[48]

4. Do smokers waste more time on the job than non-smokers?[49]

Both smokers and non-smokers have nonproductive time during the day that allows them to "regroup" and then plug away for another period of time. Employees might do this by chatting with co-workers, eating a candy bar, staring into space, or smoking a cigarette. As one respondent in a 1988 American Management Society survey commented, "the people who don't smoke find lots of other ways to waste time."[50] Tollison and Wagner put the matter in these terms:

> "Experience in any business establishment will show all kinds of ways that nonsmokers can also take what might be called on-the-job leisure: drinking coffee, making shopping lists on a computer, talking about sports with a colleague, and daydreaming while appearing to be thinking, are a few of many possible illustrations."[51]

If smoking during work breaks were prohibited, smoking employees would find some other way to unwind. As Tollison and Wagner observed, "a bit of rest time periodically may lead to higher levels of overall performance than would be possible if breaks were not allowed."[52] Employees are not robots, and cannot be expected to work intensely every minute of the day without a break.

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If workers truly are unproductive or inefficient on the job, it will show in their actual performance. On the other hand, once personal behaviors are regulated to enhance productivity on the job, there is no logical stopping point. If it is acceptable for an employer to disallow smoking because such activity "steals" several potentially productive minutes of the day, why should it not be acceptable for the employer to regulate minutes spent in the bathroom, minutes spent at the water cooler, or time used to drink coffee or floss one's teeth?

5. Do smokers cause increased health care costs?

It has not been established that smokers incur greater health care costs than nonsmokers. In countries with nationalized health care schemes such as the United Kingdom, the data indicate that through tobacco taxes, smokers not only pay their own way, but also subsidize health care for others. Dr. Kevin Dowd of Nottingham University reports that in 1988-89, tobacco tax revenues amounted to one quarter of the entire cost of running the National Health Service.[53] Those revenues, moreover, were twelve times the costs the NHS asserts are attributable to treating conditions claimed to be tobacco-related.

In the United States and other countries that rely on private health insurance, some insurers offer nonsmoker discounts to individual policyholders. According to the United States Surgeon General, however, they offer such discounts "with little supportive actuarial experience that nonsmokers incur fewer claims."[54] Studies suggesting that smokers do incur

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higher medical expenses than non-smokers typically fail to control for lifestyle factors other than cigarette smoking that reportedly bear significantly upon medical expenses, such as alcohol consumption, diet, income and education.[55]

Antismoking advocates promise that once employers have banished smoking and smokers from the workplace, "insurance rates can be slashed through renegotiation,"[56] but this assertion appears to be baseless. There is no reason to suppose that insurance companies will reduce their premiums for group policies (accounting for about 80 percent of the health insurance market in the United States) once a company institutes a no-smoking policy. The very same activist who promised that insurance rates will be "slashed" by employers who implement antismoking policies admitted elsewhere that, to reduce insurance costs after banishing smokers and smoking from the workplace, firms would have to self-insure.[57]

If employers permit insurers to dictate what activities their employees may engage in based on reported risk, the door will be open to meddling by insurers in other employee lifestyle choices. For example, sports-related injuries are a major health care cost.[58] Should an employer allow an insurer to force him to restrict the athletic activities of employees because of health insurance costs? To determine what foods an employee can eat?[59] Once such interference has been accepted in one case, there is no end to the lifestyle decisions an employer's insurer could impose on workers.

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6. Are smokers more prone to injuries and accidents on the job than are nonsmokers?

It is absurd -- and unfair -- to label any group of people collectively as accident prone, and then to make employment policies based on the generalization. There are, no doubt, many nonsmokers with terrible accident records, and smokers with impeccable records. Each employee should be judged as an individual based on relevant factors such as ability and employment history, not solely on smoking status or any other personal lifestyle choice.

Some studies suggest an association between smoking status and occupational accidents and injuries, while others do not. The large Israeli industries study, for example, reported no significant differences in days lost for accidents between smokers and nonsmokers.[60] Studies that do report an association, however, typically fail to control for important confounding factors such as social and personality characteristics. A 1986 study by Metts and Mill, for example, claimed that those workers who had "ever smoked" (i.e., former as well as current smokers) were at higher risk of some classes of workplace accidents and injuries than those workers who had never smoked.[61] But the authors strongly suggested that the risk-taking characteristic of individuals who smoke may have been responsible for this difference: "[T]here appears to be a wide variation of risk among the injury/accident classes * * *. Smokers appear to be at higher risk in [those] work situations where opportunities

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for taking risk are afforded." Discounting the hypothesis that smoking is the cause of workplace accidents and injuries, the authors stated that "other, more elusive factors" -- including personality -- "may be responsible."

A 1992 study of postal employees in Boston also reported finding a link between self-reported smoking status and accidents/injuries on the job, but this study likewise failed to control for the possible confounding effects of alcohol use and social or personality characteristics.[62] The authors even acknowledged that "some of the associations demonstrated [may be] attributable to alcoholism rather than smoking." Indeed, the authors of the study questioned whether a policy against hiring smokers would result in a decrease in workplace accidents or injuries, "as these may be linked to social and behavioral characteristics that might persist after cessation of, or a decrease in, smoking."

The social and personality characteristics that may account for any statistical relationship between smoking status and occupational risk obviously will persist in people even after the last employee has quit smoking. If the goal is to eliminate employees who possess these social and personality characteristics, using smoking status as a surrogate -- excluding smokers who do not possess those characteristics and failing to exclude nonsmokers who do possess them -- is both unfair and inefficient.

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7. *Would banishing smoking and smokers from the workplace boost morale and improve productivity?*

Antismoking advocates have claimed that workers readily accept smoking restrictions[63] and that smoking bans improve morale, but a number of studies indicate that smoking bans actually may lower productivity and worsen morale. For example, a 1991 survey of United Kingdom managers and workers conducted by FOREST, a smokers' rights organization, found that the majority of managers reported that the imposition of restrictive workplace smoking policies had caused serious problems. Sixty-five percent said that productivity had fallen and 62% reported that tension had arisen between staff.[64]

Similarly, a Response Analysis study found that "the vast majority of all managers and union representatives reject the notion that a smoking ban would enable the same amount of work to be accomplished with fewer employees -- in other words, that group productivity would increase if smoking were prohibited."[65] The study also reported that the majority of managers whose businesses did not have smoking regulations believed that a smoking ban would worsen morale. Only four percent believed a ban would improve it.[66]

Professor Richard W. Ault and his colleagues at Auburn University also have reported that efforts to impose bans or limitations on smoking on the job are "costly and futile," in large part because smoking bans hurt morale.[67] Many employees experience reduced job satisfaction as a result of smoking

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restrictions.[68] Even some advocates of smoking bans concede that bans have little effect on productivity, and that bans can cause tension between workers.[69] Biener and colleagues, in a 1989 study of the effect of a restrictive smoking policy on work performance at a general hospital, reported that a majority of smokers and nonsmokers felt the policy had no effect -- positive or negative -- and 19 percent of the smokers felt their work had deteriorated.[70]

For many employees, smoking is part of the employee's repertoire of personal behaviors. Interfering with such behaviors, in smokers or nonsmokers, can undermine efficiency and impair morale.[71] Employers would be wise to consider other ways of improving employee morale without infringing on employee lifestyle choices, such as new furniture, piped-in music, longer coffee breaks or even higher salaries.[72]

Some employers are refusing to hire smokers altogether, regardless of whether they are the best qualified for the job.[73] Employers who refuse to consider job applicants who smoke risk eliminating the most qualified person from consideration and passing up exceptional talent. Categorically eliminating groups of people from hiring consideration for characteristics unrelated to job performance is not only unfair, it is economically inefficient. Whenever individuals are excluded from consideration based on some "group" to which they belong -- be it racial, age, sex or diet or other lifestyle choice -- potentially superior employees are turned away.[74] Employers

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should simply hire the best workers for the job -- some will happen to be smokers and some will not.[75]

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